

76 people who making art walked together

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Once upon a time there were 76 people who walked together to make art, and who made art while walking together (Martinez Morales, 2016). This story, we could say started on a given day, when a story began that changed lives. This is part of that story.

As a literary and photographic narrative, this poetic expression relates to a research project called “Hacer camino” or “Make Way” that emerged through a process of artistic production and participatory community engagement. The title, *Hacer camino*, was unanimously agreed upon because it spoke to what it meant to make our way through life (Machado, 1982). We believe that each of the 76 people who contributed to the project were thinking-with one another, making this a collective action where people made art, whether professional artist or not, by agreeing to discuss, reflect and make public different ways of being in the world (Moreno-Montoro, Tirado, López-Peláez & Martínez-Morales, 2017).

This project begin with a meeting to build relationships between the community of Alcaudete, a small town in the province of Jaén, Spain, and students from the Masters of Research and Aesthetic Education (MRAE) program at the University of Jaén, guided by the co-authors of this chapter who instruct in the MRAE program. Our group began to create art, which led to the production of an exhibition in the second phase of the project. But not everything can be encapsulated into these actions. There were more steps that followed. What developed was an artistic action that morphed into an inquiry process, touring places and engaging more people and more stories along the way. In this interlude, we present our reflections of the production stage.

Figure 1. Student art. Courtesy of Eufemio Fernández López (2018).

The goal of our project is continue to create ‘meeting spaces’ that inspire artistic productions. To facilitate this goal, we describe the relationship of people and artistic works in images, text, fabric and perhaps most importantly, by walking together with stories. We conclude with shared observations that reflect the respective social places from which we speak. We proceed with an understanding we are all equal, and that we are here to ‘make the way,’ and in the process, artistic creation gives us the possibility of designing, tracing and executing our paths. If art is changing in time and space (Zolberg, 2002), then who we are now is always situated, in our locations, languages and artistic practices, among other attributes. We believe *Hacer camino* is a good example of where time and space converge with contemporary media and the many languages of art. In this project, we encouraged everyone to draw on the breadth of contemporary artistic practices, including performative expressions, installations, sound recordings, videography, photography, as well as traditional drawing or painting (Berger, 1958). Everything that we are able to do with the body and the mind we traced in the walk of life.

Figure 2. Student art. Courtesy of Eufemio Fernández López (2018).

We summarize *Hacer camino* as research through the histories of encounters between people from different places, doing collective artistic practices as a way to break down barriers and apprehensions in their own lives to support the creative process of others. *76 people who making art walked together* is the story of a relational encounter of writing, drinking coffee, recounting lives, while drawing, knitting, sewing and doing embroidery – much as has been the tradition of many women in Spain who have done so for many years in silence. This is our story of meeting

and sharing, an emotional journey of many.

“Nuestra Señora de la Asunción” and walking together...

After several sessions with community members whom we had developed collective artistic actions previously, we made contact with the therapeutic community of Our Lady of the Assumption, or *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*. It was there we wrote a collective letter in fabric, and that letter became a great embroidered stele to unfold our walking together. It began between seasons of fall and winter, but it often seemed more like spring to us. The landscape and the sun smiled as we worked together with interns, staff, and students, all were 76. It was 2017.

According to Patricia Espíritu (2018), “all retirement homes have tranquility in common” (p. 11). The therapeutic community, or village of *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*, is located in the countryside. It is an old farmhouse. This farm is in nature, with a landscape of mountains, pure air and sun, encircled by trees and birds, where coffee, biscuits and long conversation often met us at the entrance hall. We spent many days at this site, inspired by the questions, answers, decisions and complexities of the people. More days came, and the decisions came too. Decisions on what to create, and how, during those months in which we began to walk together, create together, we were ‘making the way.’

This is how we began. This is how we investigated. This is how we made art. And this is how we made artistic education. Our methodology evolved and we began to walk our stories together when doing art and education (Manning, 2016; Valladares, 2016, Villegas, 2018; Fernández, 2019).

Figure 3. Author of the essay. Martínez Morales, M. (2019).

Encarni, who was Encarni

Among the 76 people was Encarni. Encarni was at that time an intern at the home. A young woman with a hard story, and history, who was living through drug addiction to an extreme degree. She was just starting to recognize herself, and decided to take us up on our proposal to make art. She wanted to write. She told her friend about what she was experiencing, and she did it in the letter. She gave that letter to us, and in the process, she made us her friends.

La carta

Encarni was the ‘link between’ the therapeutic community and the subsequent journey of our embroidered stele in which her letter was transcribed in fabric. She walks with us through her story. She remains the link between our particular way of working collectively, to bring art and education together, and the 76 people ‘making way.’ In the fabric are her feelings, her everyday experiences.

Figure 4. Author of the essay. Courtesy of Martínez Morales, M. (2019).

How Encarni’s letter became a collective wake

Seeing Encarni’s letter, the stories of grandmothers came to mind in a kind of collective wake. They taught us how to sew. They told us things: “Take the paper and draw the silhouette with soap, cut it out.” We admired them with the handling of their technologies, the sewing machine, with its sound, and the hand needle, quieter. Long or short points depending on the step of the technology. Embracing those memories, like an imperceptible presence during our research project. Encarni’s letter activated a process. We are all a story of stories. Our memories are our

sewing tools that serve as a process and experience. It was an experience of memories that summon us from memory.

Figure 5. Students art. Courtesy of Sofia Dumas Tello (2018).

Figure 6. Students art. Courtesy of Sofia Dumas Tello (2018).

Heuristics: The moment when the spark jumps

In the therapeutic community we continued having coffee with residents. We had coffee and imagined what would happen moments later. We did not know where to start, so we had more coffee.

We had long, whole pieces of cloth. One linen, another canvas, and there was another fine gauze. They were folded over and over, following the same wrinkles. We stretched the gauze on the floor of the meeting room. White. It was time to make. Encarni had already written her letter, in pencil and ink on paper, and her letter was the moment when the spark jumped.

Spin that story

Thread over and over

That memory that she liked so much,

Perhaps not to forget to sew in her memory.

To count the words.

We tried to read each letter of each word that composed her story. Like a new alphabet that emerged from poor vision, we deciphered her script of 'secret writings,' and with the aspect of drawing, it brought a whim of chance to bear on the process. Things only make sense to those who know how to find it.

The process continued and became a letter of thread and fine gauze, with her letter now inscribed on fabric. It was hung like a large curtain on the stone wall of the courtyard of San Miguel, in the Museum of Jaén. Then, the following year, the cloth was transformed by light, passing through the thinness to illuminate the black tint of the thread into the immense white room of the Francisco Fernández Art Center in Torreblascopedro (Jaén, Spain).

This writing is walking with stories.

Writing is walking.

We walk through the streets

We look for smells, objects, earth

We keep them in our boxes, as stories.

Inks and paths, both obey the act of maneuvering

With the gaze according to where we are going

Participate in the process

The letter continues to be written.

Our 76 people are now 760 or 7600, or more, as the stories - told, written, shared and embroidered on a great fabric trail - have journeyed Viseu, Vancouver, Torreblascopedro, all adding to the letters of linen, canvas and gauze. In fact we no longer know precisely how many

shared in our collective project, since the project has passed through Canada, Switzerland, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia and China, where we continue to share and create together.

Our walking together continues.

Figure 7. Author of the essay. Moreno Montoro, M.I. (2019).

Figure 8. Author of the essay. Moreno Montoro, M.I. (2019).

What's left

Today we have the images of yesterday, of what was then, and what is happening now. The words of people who interweave lives on fabric walk on. For instance, Celia is seduced by the idea of living elsewhere. She often travels and imagines what it would be like to stay there, in a new landscape, yet always in transit. Ana talked about the neighborhood, the street, the place where we live, the garden as what we keep, which we carefully care for. The words that Ana sewed onto her fabric-story describe her thoughts, the places from 'where one sees the world,' the places halfway between presence and representation, where spaces speak of other spaces.

The function of the thread

Is to sift the entrance of the light.

Fabric works at the same time as a provocative veil

And as a protective structure.

The letter is being written. On paper with ink. On the fabric with thread. In our memory

with past experiences, ours and those around us. In our lives and our knowledge, with the processes that “make way.”

Figure 9. Author of the essay. Moreno Montoro, M.I. (2019).

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